

Congressman Wally Herger (R-CA) issued the following statement after requesting a committee hearing on legislation he introduced earlier this year. The California Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention and Community Protection Act focuses on limiting the restrictions on removal of hazardous fuels from national forests. These fuels often lead to yearly forest fires that endanger Northern California communities. You can view Herger's letter requesting the hearing below.

“While the North State has thus far been extremely fortunate in avoiding a repeat of last year’s horrific fire season, the next catastrophic wildfire remains only a stray spark away. I firmly believe that the key to reducing the risk of wildfire year after year is to reduce the fuels that make them so devastating. In many cases, our Northern California forests are now ten times denser than they were historically, and are a ticking time bomb that threatens the lives and property of those who call these forests home.

“Earlier this year, in response to this growing threat to our communities and their citizens, I introduced a commonsense bill designed to reduce the threat of fire by streamlining the environmental review and appeal process to expedite hazardous fuels reduction and forest management projects surrounding forest communities. This legislation has significant support, including endorsements from numerous forestry groups and affected county governments. Although management is needed beyond the immediate vicinity of our homes and businesses, I believe this legislation is a reasonable ‘first step’ towards reducing dangerous fuels, and I will continue to urge my fellow members to join me in enacting a bipartisan solution to ensure the health and safety of our communities.”

Letter to Natural Resources Chairman Nick Rahall (D-WV) and Ranking Member Doc Hastings (R-WA)

Dear Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Hastings,

Since the onset of the 2009 fire season, nearly 400,000 acres across the State of California

have been consumed by wildfire, while two fires remain uncontained and continue to burn. These fires have caused the evacuations of thousands of people while destroying hundreds of homes and other structures, not to mention the debilitating health effects from smoke that clouds the air even several miles from each fire. Adding insult to injury is the fact that in many cases, the danger presented to the individuals affected by these fires could have been reduced or avoided altogether by simply restoring commonsense forest management to the federal lands surrounding these areas. Decades of failed policy with respect to fire suppression and forest management have left many of the national forests throughout California in a state of utter disarray. With forests that are now at least ten times as dense as their historic structure, it should come as no surprise that these unnatural fuel loads present an overwhelming threat to public health and safety each fire season.

It is for these reasons that we introduced H.R. 2899, the "California Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention and Community Protection Act," on June 16th. H.R. 2899 builds on existing authorities from the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 to implement hazardous fuels and forest restoration projects on federal lands surrounding our forest communities, while providing further relief under a county and state designated emergency. Although we acknowledge that management is needed across the landscape, we feel that this legislation provides much-needed flexibility and gives our federal land managers the appropriate tools to protect the homes and businesses of those who reside near our federal forest lands. Therefore, we respectfully request that the House Natural Resources Committee hold a legislative hearing to consider this bill. You will find attached letters received to date in support of this legislation from a wide range of stakeholders and constituent-interest groups.

As evidenced by the current blazes throughout the State, particularly the devastating Station Fire in Los Angeles County, catastrophic wildfire remains only a stray spark away. In addition to the threat presented to the human environment, these fires destroy watersheds and wildlife habitat, as well as emit millions of tons of carbon dioxide. As such, it is important that forest management - within the wildland urban interface and across the landscape – be included in the Congressional debate concerning environmental stewardship and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We hope that the Committee will work with us to move H.R. 2899 through the legislative process and assist in reducing needless red tape so that professional land managers can do the work necessary to protect our constituents from the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Thank you for your consideration.